



Pick Your Path to Health

Dealing with Depression

Have you ever had one of those days? A day where nothing seems to go right, you feel down, everything gets on your nerves, and you can't shake that weepy feeling?

Sure you have, everyone has. However, for some women, "those days" aren't just a day—they stretch into weeks or months. At those times, there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. Continued feelings of irritability, low self-esteem, lack of energy, and sadness are more than a bad day—they may be signs of depression.

No one knows for sure what causes depression. Doctors believe that it might be brought on by genetics, body chemistry, or difficulty in dealing with changes and problems. Interestingly, research shows that major depression and chronic depression affect approximately twice as many women as men. And while African American women suffer from depression less often than white women, when African Americans do experience depression, they are more likely to be severely depressed. In short, when we're hit, we're hit hard.

"One in five women will experience depression at some point in their lifetime," says Amy Niles, Executive Director of the National Women's Health Resource Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping women make informed decisions about their health. "It's quite common—nothing to be ashamed of."

Women with major or severe depression need the assistance of mental health professionals, but there are several steps all women can take to prevent or reduce the milder effects of the ailment.

- Seek the support of family and friends. Being with people who love and care for you keeps you from feeling isolated and helpless.
- Break a sweat! Regular exercise is a proven morale booster. Studies show that exercising increases the levels of certain body chemicals that promote feelings of well being. Taking a walk with a friend may boost your spirits and give you the chance to spend time quality time with someone close.

- Ask for help or accept it when it's offered. Although African American women are seen as role models for their strength in adversity, there is no reward for taking on too much without any help or relief.
- Take a lesson from teachers. When showing their students how to tackle a problem, whether it's writing a story or doing a project, teachers tell their students, "Take it one step at a time." Sometimes problems can seem impossible to solve, but almost any task at home or work can be broken down into smaller, manageable pieces.

Get the Help You Need

"In general, depression isn't something you just 'get over,'" Niles says, "so it's important that women learn to recognize depression and speak to a physician or health care provider when they see symptoms in themselves. Effective treatment options are available," Niles stresses.

Studies do show that prescription medications and talk therapy, alone or in combination, help 80 percent of people with depression. If symptoms remain for longer than 1 or 2 weeks, check with your local clinic or look in the Yellow Pages under "mental health." And don't allow money to keep you from getting the help you need—services are generally offered at low- or no-cost for those who have limited financial means.

When given the right information and the right help, women have the power to take the steps needed toward a brighter, hopeful path of wellness.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."